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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park spoke to students at Deer Path Middle School in Lake Forest Sept. 12, presenting his view on issues facing the 10th District and the nation, as well as giving them an inside look at the American political process.

The Congressman, speaking to an audience of sixth-graders as well as a small group of fifth-graders, brought up many issues relevant to the students' lives. For example, he asked the students if any of them had heard of the Web site Myspace.com, to which hands shot up all across the room. The protection of children from negative influences on the Internet was a cause of concern for him.

"When someone contacts you on MySpace with the screen name 12-year-old soccer fan, that person may be a 45-year-old creep," he said, "We're worried kids may not fully realize who they're dealing with."

Another issue significant to the children discussed by the Congressman was the requirements of special-education children. Noting that the federal government promised to help pay millions of dollars in special-education costs, he lamented their failure to uphold this promise.

In the Q-and-A portion of his appearance, one student asked about his position on global warming. He told the students he recognized the importance of combating climate change. As evidence, he touted his co-sponsorship of the McCain-Lieberman global warming bill.

Citing the failure of a legislative effort to increase fuel economy standards, Kirk said he hoped progress would eventually be achieved.

"We have our work cut out for us," he said.

Sept. 11 memory

He also devoted a significant portion of time to discussing the threat of terrorism. Remarking that the day before had been the anniversary of Sept. 11, he relayed the events from his perspective. He told the students that he was having breakfast with the Secretary of Defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon when they were given the news regarding the World Trade Center. He said that he evacuated the Pentagon as soon as they were notified of the second plane's impact.

"I was 20 minutes ahead of the plane that hit the Pentagon," he said.

He asked the students if they knew why these events transpired, and then told them that the perpetrators opposed our Constitutional values.

"We all agree with these ideas. They don't," he said.

He also asserted the need for resolve in opposition to those who wish America harm.

"What do we do - surrender?" he asked, "No, we protect our tolerant, free and open society."

Principal Carol Lynne Krumes said that Kirk has developed a good relationship with the students.

"He has an excellent rapport with the children," she said, "He relates to them the information on a level they can understand."

"I thought it was going to be one of those boring conversations adults have," fifth-grader Stephanie Goebel told Kurkes, "but instead it was funny stories, vivid images and interesting facts."

He was taken aback by one student's question. After being asked why he supported a bill allowing torture, he denied having done so.

"I didn't vote for it," he said.

Still, he said he disagreed with the position of shutting down the prison in Guantanamo Bay, and said if the prisoners there are brought to the United States, negative consequences may result.

He got a positive response with the story of his personal experience aboard Air Force One. The president's plane, he said, is stocked with packages of red, white and blue M&M's.

"People steal as many as possible," he said, garnering a laugh from the audience.

Several classes wrote thank-you letters to him afterwards. For many, this proved to be a memorable anecdote.

"One of the teachers asked children to write about the one thing they wouldn't forget," Krumes said, "and a lot of them said it was the M&M's."